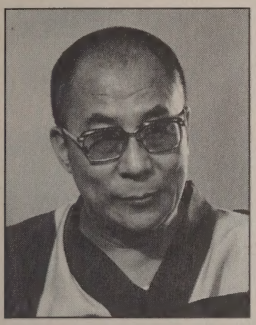
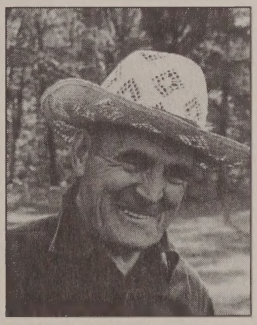
HOW DO THESE PEOPLE PRAY?





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FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

Sample Issue

Dear Spiritual Friend,

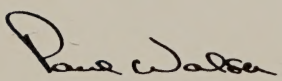
If you haven't seen *Fellowship in Prayer* before, a few words about who we are might be of interest. *Fellowship in Prayer,* incorporated in New York City on June 5, 1950, is a non-profit, interfaith organization whose purpose is to promote the practice of prayer and meditation.

We believe that prayer can make a profound and lasting difference in the life and well-being of the individual and of the global community and natural world of which each of us is an interrelated part.

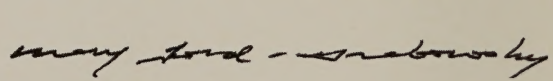
Regardless of our particular faith tradition, meditation and prayer lead us away from the selfish ego, with its insatiable demand for power, possessions and worldly success, and into the depths of our being. There we may reconnect with the divine energy that enables us to act with loving kindness toward each other and all of God's creation.

These beliefs come to life in the pages of *Fellowship in Prayer* — a bimonthly interfaith journal with an international readership in 80 countries. Each 48 page issue of Fellowship in Prayer (The special issue you are now reading is only an 18 page sampling of a regular issue) offers you the spiritual insights, practices and beliefs of women and men from a broad spectrum of the world's faith communities. The emphasis is on the individual writer's personal experience of the holy — of the sacred dimension of life as she or he has experienced it in his or her daily life. The authors range from the very well known, such as Matthew Fox, Mother Tessa Bielecki, Thich Nhat Hanh, Rabbi Joseph Gelberman and the Dalai Lama, to people who have never written for publication before, but who have had a "Transforming Experience" that changed their lives. Our readers are women and men from every walk of life and every imaginable occupation. They are from many different religious and spiritual traditions, but all share the same belief in the power of prayer. We hope you will want to join them in becoming a regular reader of *Fellowship in Prayer.*

God between you and all harm.



Paul Walsh
President



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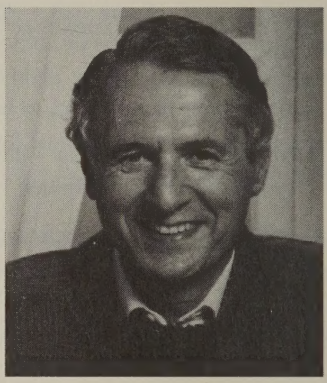
Cover photograph by Brooks Walsh.

Empowering People: An Interview with Arthur Caliandro



A member of the Board of Trustees of Fellowship in Prayer, Dr. Arthur Caliandro is Senior Minister at the Marble Collegiate Church on 5th Avenue in New York City. The 46th minister in a succession that began in 1628, he followed Norman Vincent Peale, whose best selling book, The Power of Positive Thinking, *became a classic.*

Fellowship in Prayer's *editor, Mary Ford Grabowsky, interviewed Dr. Caliandro in his office at Marble Collegiate Church.*

Q. Norman Vincent Peale once referred to you as a "people builder." What did he mean by that?

A. One thing I've learned is that I can't control another person, I can't make them do anything. The best thing I can do is to affirm and enable and give freedom. Everybody here at Marble is free, free with their gifts. If somebody has the ability to make something happen I try to recognize and affirm and encourage that person so they can be who they are.

Every human being needs to be loved, needs to be valued, needs to be encouraged. That is the basic foundation that we have here at the Church. Just the plain practice of hospitality. I care for you, you're important, you're special. Every individual needs this. We try to relate more on the level of the heart than the head because we don't nurture and help each other if we only deal with the intellect. We've discovered that as people are nurtured they feel valued; then they're in a position to appreciate the needs of others and will respond to the challenge of involvement in the life of the community. I've been overwhelmed at the numbers of people who volunteer to sleep in shelters run by not-for-profit organizations to help the homeless. They get there at 9 or 10 o'clock at night, converse with the homeless and have breakfast with them the next morning, then go on to work.

Q. Are women emerging at Marble Collegiate?

A. We've had women on the board for five years and this church goes back a long time, to 1628. I remember my own process, "who can the first women be?" It was important to me and some of us here that those first women be very strong people, have something to contribute but not be overwhelming in their strength. And I've yet to hear one complaint about either one of them. They are very competent, very strong, very gracious, very feminine.

Q. What do you think women want today?

A. I think that women want and need power. They want to be womanly and female, with all of the "niceties" of that, the softness, and yet they want to be recognized as full human beings who are equal, who are as good as, if not better than their male counterpart. There is pain that women are not there yet and they know they're not there yet and it's frustrating. The church has a hard time with this. It has been a male dominated society since day one. The old testament is male dominated. The canon of the scripture was done by men. The rulers and elders of the church have been men and only in the last generation have women begun to assume the role. It's exciting to see what's happening in this church.

Q. What do you see as the real problem for men today?

A. Identity. Identity is a major thing happening with men. Strangely most of the people I talk to who come to this church are struggling with this and know that they want to be more open and more inclusive of who they are. They have a higher level of respect for the feminine, for the feminine parts of themselves that need to be expressed. These are people who are interested in learning how to cry and know that because they haven't been able to cry they have missed something and there is a lot of pent-up feeling in them. On the other hand, there are those men who have a sort of John Wayne complex, a need for distance, for the man to be strong, whatever that means; to be dominant, I think. They'll say that is what strength is.

Q. What are the spiritual needs of the people who come to this Church?

A. This is a church that can be classified as a re-entry church. The majority of people who come here have been away from the church for a long time and most of them were injured by the church when they were younger, abused with guilt trips, with criticism, with rigidity. Now when they discover in themselves an interest and hunger for something spiritual, for God, for faith, they feel Marble is a safe place to come to, because they're not going to get beaten up emotionally or spiritually.

People essentially don't know how to pray and they want to learn how to pray. People want faith, as I mentioned, and faith, as you know, is something you can talk about, but you don't get faith by reading about it. It's a contagious thing. . .faith is caught. People are looking for that.

Also, there is a continuing request and desire for learning how to improve relationships. Because that's where most of our problems come from, our sadness, our happiness, whatever, comes from our ability or inability to get along with other people. So we gear a lot to that in various ways. One is we have a lot of small groups, Share and Prayer Groups. Also we refer a lot of people to therapy. Not everybody needs therapy but everybody could be helped by it. We probably have several hundred people who are or have been in counseling and what we discovered is that if a person is getting good therapy, that releases them and enables them to grow spiritually. Unless some of those internal, emotional knots are addressed and untied, we keep on doing a spiritual whitewash, praying to solve a problem instead of solving it.

On occasion I preach on the text, "You shall know the truth and the truth will make you free". I think what Jesus was saying there is you can know the fullness of who you are, you can know the depth of your human experience, you can be in touch with the range of feeling, in touch with your anger, your depression, your frustration, your temptation, your loneliness, your despair, and as you relate to the fullness of the range of the human experience, you open to the movement of the spirit. As we discover ourselves, we discover what our truth is, and that truth sets us free. An example: a number of years ago I was going through a very difficult time. On the surface, things were going well with my life, family, children, work, friendships, health, but

something was wrong inside. I was dead inside. I had tried a whole series of different kinds of prayers — the Jesus Prayer — Lord have mercy on me and make haste to help me — and so forth. None of them solved the problem, but I think they helped get me to the next place, where the spirit intercedes for us. One June morning, on vacation in Maine, I read the story of Jesus and the blind man. Jesus asked the blind man, "What can I do for you?" and the blind man answered, "That I might receive my sight." I had a very specific sense at that point that the blind man's prayer was my prayer, "That I may receive my sight." It was very clear that this was the prayer I was to pray. June, July, August, September, October, November were the worst months of my life. I went through unbelievable hell. My second open heart operation. Fear that I was going to die and that everything I had worked for was going to collapse. I did not know, as I look back on it now, that I was getting in touch with my own truth, that my prayer was being answered. I had to go through the fires to find this truth - my personhood, my feelings.

Q. You wrote a pamphlet about the value of a loving attitude. Please tell me about that.

A. One of my major themes is attitude. Attitude may be the only area in life where we have absolute freedom of choice. Attitude isn't everything. It doesn't solve all our problems but it points in whatever direction we are going. And whatever attitude we have, it creates an aura around us, an energy field around us. If it's positive, if it's confident, if it's joyous, if it's hopeful, if it's optimistic, we have a certain aura. And that projects. If it's negative, if it's demeaning, it comes back to us. But attitude is something that nobody can make us have. Nobody. We can be forced to do many things, but we cannot be forced to have an attitude that we do not want to have. We have absolute choice on this. Of all the psychologizing that's been done - and I've studied a lot of psychology — the bottom line is what we choose, which direction we choose to take, what the position of the mind will be with whatever. We really serve the world best if we choose to have a loving attitude.

But all shall be well
and all shall be well,
and all manner of things shall be well.
Lady Julian of Norwich

Christ has no body now on earth but yours,
no hands but yours,
no feet but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which is to look out
Christ's compassion to the world;
Yours are the feet with which he is to go about
doing good;
Yours are the hands with which he is to bless men now.
Saint Teresa of Avila

Thank you, heavenly Father,
for my bread,
my dad and mother and my bed.
Amen.
Traditional

Grant, O merciful God, that with malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as you give us to see the right, we may strive to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan; to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.
Abraham Lincoln

Grandfather, Great Father, let matters go well with me, for I am going into the forest.
Bambuti Pygmy prayer

Dear God, be good to me. The sea is so wide, and my boat is so small.
Breton fisherman's prayer

These prayers are from The Gift of Prayer, *a 300 page treasury of prayers from all times, peoples, and faith traditions. Published by Fellowship in Prayer, it will be available in bookstores in the fall of 1995.*

From Prayers to Prayer

KAREN RUSHEN

Two minutes with a tiny old woman in a South Korean temple have lasted a lifetime.

Please send the story of your own "transforming experience" to the Editor, 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, NJ 08542.

When I was thirteen I had an experience that changed the way I looked at God from that day forward. At that time, my family and I lived in South Korea, where my father, an engineer, was helping to open a new factory. My mother, who loved to learn about history and art, insisted upon frequent family excursions to the various local Buddhist temples where, guidebook in hand, she would take in all the details of the temple art and architecture, explaining to us the meanings of the bronze and carved imagery adorning the temple gates and buildings.

Being thirteen, I loved to exercise my independence on such occasions, wandering a safe distance to savor the situation alone with my own thoughts. In this way I one day happened upon a small side building of a local temple in which a tiny old woman was praying.

At first I didn't give her much attention, as I wandered to the front of the room to get a good look at the bronze Buddha image surrounded by offerings of incense, fruit, flowers and sweet cakes. Yet when I glanced at the woman, kneeling before the image, my heart skipped a beat. She was so caught up in the act of praying that her face, its features softened in an expression of deep joy and quiet ecstacy, literally glowed. Though her hands moved slowly in graceful gestures of what appeared to be supplication, there seemed to be about her a solid confidence, and a sure intimacy between her and the deity before her that I couldn't help but be speechless with wonder.

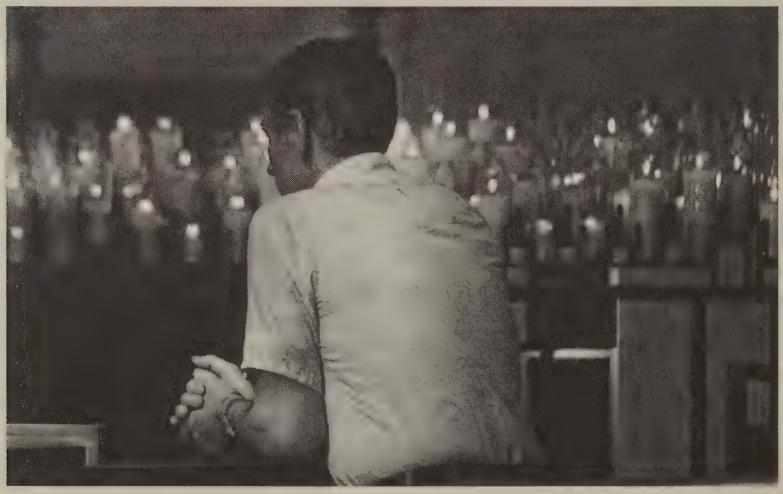
Raised in the Catholic tradition, I had made the smug assumption that God only spoke to Christian people and only answered Christian prayers, even though the nuns who had instructed me assured us children that God loved all good people everywhere no matter what beliefs they held. Still, this woman was enlivened by God in a way I had never seen before—her belief looked so deep, so certain, so sweet that I felt an ache of envy go through me. How I had struggled with the boredom and repetition of prayer and praying, and yet here was a woman who had somehow, in some manner broken through and

found in praying a rich, living dialogue, and an intimate relationship with her God.

At some point, this little Korean woman caught sight of me, staring at her in so intrusive a manner, and a warm smile spread over her face. She beckoned for me to join her, and, placing her hands in the posture of prayer, gestured towards the Buddha image with a look of knowing confidence. I was totally undone by embarrassment yet felt a desperate desire to in some way experience what this woman experienced, so, after looking around me to be sure I wasn't being watched, I knelt self-consciously in front of the bronze image and tried to form a petition.

I prayed something like this: God, don't strike me dead if kneeling before this Buddhist image is some form of Christian heresy. Please see that my intentions are sincere, that this woman knows you in a way that I want to know you, so that your knowledge radiates from within me and all over me, so that I really know you, not just in formal prayers and doctrine, but intimately, like a good and well-loved friend. No feelings of ecstasy swept me off my feet, but in my heart I felt a tiny warm stirring, not unlike a smile, that was the beginning of something between God and me: an understanding and a quest.

I wish I could end in saying that I have succeeded in my quest, but I have a long, long way to go in my journey. Still, I had a glimpse of my destination in the face of that small Korean woman, and that knowledge still fires my heart and pushes me onward.



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Return To An Innocence: A Spiritual Journey

GARY JACINTO

Climbing a strenuous trail in the snow-capped Himalaya, this traveler with AIDS found a lost part of himself.

The sun reflected silver-white on the wings of the 737. Below, spreading into the hot, brown plain of India, was New Delhi. We followed the Ganges east; the river gave no relief to the endless beige. Far away to the north a thin band of green indicated the foothills of the Terai where a pass led to a protected mountain valley and our destination, Kathmandu.

I had lived with AIDS two years and, having just turned 50, sought a sanctuary, the Annapurna Sanctuary, an alpine meadow surrounded by 8,000-meter peaks a hundred or so miles to the west of Kathmandu and a week's hike north into the Himalaya. As the Indian sub-continent slipped silently by, I remembered a friend's joke about my "going to the mountain." I wondered how different the man who went up would be from the one who came down.

* * *

The taxi dropped us off at the trailhead on the new Chinese road to Jomosom, a village high in the Himalaya growing quickly into a town. We were three: Sharon, my sister, an experienced backpacker; Binod, our Nepalese guide/porter; and me, a New Yorker whose back had not felt a pack for twenty-five years. The trail was not immediately apparent, then I saw the rock stairs winding through the forest up the mountain. Peaceful, beautiful to the eye, they invited the traveler to pass this way. We began.

Within minutes my heart beat in my ears, breath came in gasps, my neck stiffened and my back ached. The pack seemed to gain weight as I stumbled from one step to another, all sense of coordination left below on the Chinese road.

A half hour later I came upon Sharon and Binod sitting on a rock, talking, waiting for me. I was in a panic, my mind a calliope of horrors. I doubted my ability to finish the trek and agonized about the damage I was doing to my already compromised health. When I re-

A member of a Unitarian Universalist community in New York City, Gary Jacinto incorporates elements of Buddhism in his spiritual practice.

gained my breath and a normal heartbeat Sharon said, "To climb a mountain is to discover your own pace, and simply move. Just listen; your body will tell you everything."

* * *

The trail was quite different from that of the infamous stairs. It was now a path, winding its way through terraced farms, forest and meadows, gently dipping here and there in its climb up the mountain.

There was something strange about this path. It was out of place, as if it were not in its proper time. I felt as though I had walked this way before and then almost swooned with the shock of memory it rekindled from my youth.

The day was my graduation from junior high school thirty-six years earlier. I had entered William Land Park walking next to the carefully placed and shaped fieldstone curb. Excited and filled with the moment, I felt that all things seemed possible.

I stood transfixed on the walkway curving through that Nepalese meadow and in the blink of my eye saw the transformation of that young man to middle age. I experienced the loss of an innocence as it swept across my memory—an innocence which slipped away from me like the air slowly leaking from a poorly tied balloon—a loss which helped create the man who now stands under the straw Bermuda Crusher shading him from the brightness of this Nepalese morning. I felt the loss of hope and all the disappointments of those intervening years and understood the resignation that crept insidiously and slowly into my life. I also felt the pain, the desperation which now propelled me in my struggle with my AIDS. Fear had crept slowly into my life. It was not a fear of something, but rather a fear through which I experienced everything—so pervasive I did not even know it was there. It separated me from life and creation itself.

Only a second or two had gone by as I paused on the path looking across the meadow this Nepalese morning. In the catharsis of those few seconds the accumulated fear of decades dissipated. The memories passed and were replaced by the exhilaration of possibility of that young man standing in that park thirty-six years earlier. I was innocently happy, filled with life. In this epiphany all things again became possible. A spiritual journey had begun.

* * *

The Moonlight Guest House at Landruk was situated below the crest of the ridge we had spent the last five hours crossing. As the

woman who took my order for pumpkin pudding was in her garden seeking the pumpkin, I looked up to the gateway of the sanctuary which was now one day closer, and I knew I would complete this journey. I was discovering my pace, a slow and easy gait which propelled me with minimum effort, and as I walked there was an increasing awareness—like a memory, an echo gently present—an awareness of being a part of something other than myself.

The clouds rushed up the valley to nestle among the Himalayan peaks as the woman discarded the seeds and began peeling the pumpkin. We were her only guests. She chopped the yellow pulp in small pieces, and with milk and sugar slowly cooked the mixture over her wood fire. With the patience of one who knows no time she stirred the ingredients in the pot. The sun had cast long shadows up the river valley before her recipe was complete. Its rays brushed the snow white peaks a pale orange as I ate her pumpkin pudding; my gaze went back and forth from bowl to mountain.

* * *

Walking slower than Sharon and Binod, I was alone much of the time. Alone with this whispered echo calling me from my unconscious, a whisper evolving itself into consciousness. I found myself thanking trees for their roots which provided staircases on the steep trails. Literally saying, "Thank you, tree, for helping me." And to my walking stick, "Thank you, bamboo, for being my walking stick." The kind of stuff that on the streets of New York would get me a bed in Bellevue Hospital, but here in Nepal, where the greeting *Namaste* means "I greet the divinity within you," my acknowledgements were both natural and profound.

I gained increasing appreciation of the moment—the texture of the path under my foot, the myriad colors in the bark of the rhododendron tree, the subtlety of taste in the simplest of foods. My perception of separation dissolved; no duality, only the moment. I cane to understand that the whisper in my ear was my memory of my Divine creation, a calling myself back to my true nature.

We walked six more days—traversing ridges, down to river valleys, up and around again, only to find another valley, another river we needed to cross. The forest gave way to bamboo. Wet, tropical, the trail sometimes became like a small stream. We climbed above the tree line, and when we stopped on the fifth night we were in the sanctuary, a few hours from our destination.

The climb the next day was through a gently sloping meadow of yellow grass 15,000 feet in the Himalaya. The milky-blue water of a glacial stream flowed under a thin layer of ice, occasionally gurgling through. We were surrounded by some of the world's highest peaks. Excited, I walked up the meadow path; my breath came in increasingly short gasps in the thin air.

That night I lay awake and listened to the thunder of chunks of ice the size of railroad boxcars falling off the glacier next to our guest house. I got up, bundled in my down jacket against the cold, and walked outside. The clouds had disappeared to reveal a canopy of night sky atwinkle with what seemed a million stars. I stood gazing at the snow covered mountains in the light of an almost full moon and was filled with a sense of accomplishment. I had made it, done this thing, this adventure that some said I should not and could not do. The journey began in spite of my AIDS, but here in the sanctuary I knew it was accomplished with my AIDS as a companion. In my return to an innocence, I not only made peace with my fellow traveler but also discovered myself—a traveler in the arms of a Divine creator.

What Is Your Symbol For God?

MARY CATHERINE SMITH

What symbol helps you to connect to God in the midst of your daily life? When I heard a lecturer ask that question, immediately a little bowl of cereal came to mind. How did such a mundane, simple thing get charged with power to evoke the Divine? Here is how it came about.

It was to have been my day of departure, the day I was to return to my convent home in the U.S.A. after 37 days in one of our convents in Europe. It was my birthday and my mother and sister were looking forward to meeting me at the airport in Philadelphia. However, all my plans changed five days earlier when I was asked to remain longer to complete some unfinished business. Instead of a transatlantic flight for my birthday there was another wonderful gift in store for me!

I awoke the morning of my birthday to sounds at my bedroom door. As I opened my door, a little array of cards and gifts on the floor greeted me, giving me a joyful start. I was quite surprised by this loving attention, and during my prayer time I commenced a litany of thanks for all the gifts and blessings and graces, great and small, that had come my way. At the end of my prayer came a small wish: for a bowl of cereal for my breakfast. The ordinary breakfast in our European convents is fruit and bread with meat or cheese. For 37 days I had not seen my ordinary breakfast of a bowl of cereal. It was a crazy sort of wish in light of all that had come to me spiritually and materially during those weeks of my stay in Germany, and you can imagine my surprise when at breakfast a Sister quietly wished me "Happy Birthday," and presented me with a little bowl of cereal!

My eyes still fill up when I think of that amazing experience. That small bowl of cereal has become for me a symbol of a loving, caring, personal God. A God who delights when we receive joy. When I am tempted to think that my prayer is not being answered, that symbolic breakfast cereal comes to mind and I look around to see how God is perhaps answering me in unexpected little ways to which I may not yet be open.

Sr. Mary Catherine, a freelance write, is a Holy Spirit Adoration Sister in Lincoln, Nebraska

Our Hunger for Connection

SHEILA MORGAN

If we're "looking for love in all the wrong places," we're failing to see that we already have what we're looking for.

What is there about connection that we hunger for? What do we want to be connected to? Or what are we disconnected from?

There is a fundamental longing in all of us to "come home." To be in that space and time where all is well, nothing is lacking, everything and everyone is in its place. We know "this is what matters, what's true." Our separateness disappears. We are complete. When we are disconnected from that place there's a kind of tension, something lacking, things are "not quite right." We're incomplete. This hunger is as primal as our hunger for food or water, and as vital as our need to breathe. What's it all about?

It would seem that if we long to be connected we must be separate. And indeed, we appear to be. We're born into this world fully connected to everything in the universe, thinking that there's no difference between us and our mothers or us and the crib. Soon we discover our separateness - mother and crib are over there and we're in here. Our socialization begins, our training to become individual personalities with healthy egos. We learn that we belong to this family, this race, this nation. We learn that I in my own little flesh suit am separate from you in your little flesh suit. We've got boundaries.

We develop talents, traits, and roles that keep the boundaries in place and make us different from each other and then define ourselves by the differences. We say, "I'm a doctor, a parent, a writer, a democrat, a hard worker, a romantic." We have an identity. Our individual personality, with ego (healthy or unhealthy) at the helm, is set for life. We know who we are. We hang out with people who fit in with who we think we are, giving us an illusion of comfort. But the lines are drawn. We're separate. Separateness is lonely. We feel incomplete. So we begin a lifelong journey searching for completion. We try to connect more deeply. We fall in love, get married, join a group, a cause,

Sheila Morgan, who lives on Martha's Vineyard, works as a psychotherapist with individuals, couples and groups. "I used to see us as human beings on a spiritual journey," she says, "but that's shifted. Now I see us as spiritual beings on a human journey. And every moment is sacred."

a church, a street gang, a team, searching for a place to call home. But home is often a long way from home.

Now and then we connect when, in some blessed moment our heart opens, to another being or to the sky, or the earth. And once in a rare blue moon, to ourselves. But since most of our searching is, as the song says, "looking for love in all the wrong places," we often miss the connection.

Perhaps we miss it because we're already connected. Perhaps our separation is an illusion. Maybe we're no more separate than a wave is separate from the ocean.

Despite the apparent separateness of things at the surface level, at a deeper level everything is a seamless extension of everything else. Quantum physicist David Bohm calls this deeper level of reality the "implicate order". This implicate order is enfolded or hidden in the "explicate order," which is the ordinary surface reality that we know.

We can see a simple mini example of this at the checkout counter in a supermarket. On the items we purchased are swirls that don't seem to mean anything, but enfolded, or hidden, in these swirls are numbers that do mean something. We can't see the numbers with our eye. But a laser scanner can "see" beneath the surface of the meaningless swirls into the meaningful order of the numbers.

The connection we're looking for can't be seen by our eyes either. The Persian poet Rumi knew this. He writes:

> Our eyes do not see you,
> but we have this excuse: Eyes
> see surface, not reality,
> though we keep hoping,
> in this lovely place.

Since most of us don't experience ourselves as subatomic particles, it's a big leap, between the idea, or concept, of interconnection and the experience of interconnection. Just like the leap between the idea of swimming and the experience of swimming. Now here comes the exciting part! We're going into the water!

Bohm also found that the experience reported by mystics throughout the ages - feelings of cosmic oneness with the universe, a sense of unity with all life - sound very much like a description of - guess what? The implicate order! He suggests that perhaps mystics are somehow able to see beyond ordinary reality into the deeper realities. Science and the Mystics connect!

The plot thickens!

Here's a marvelous description of one of those experiences from consciousness researcher, R. M. Bucke:

> Now came a period of rapture so intense that the universe stood still, as if amazed at the unutterable majesty of the spectacle. Only one in all the infinite universe! The All-loving, the Perfect One . . . In that same wonderful moment of what might be called supernal bliss, came illumination. I saw with intense inward vision the atoms or molecules, of which seemingly the universe is composed . . . rearranging themselves, as the cosmos (in its continuous, everlasting life), passes from order to order. What joy when I saw there was no break in the chain - not a link left out - everything in its place and time. Worlds, systems, all blended into one harmonious whole.

Is this experience for mystics alone? How is it that we ordinary folks miss it most of the time? Maybe we miss it because we focus on the surface reality of forms.

Perhaps the trick is to go beyond the forms, beyond the forms of nature to the deeper mystery; beyond the forms of love to the truth of our heart; beyond the forms of what we call God, to experience the all-pervading Mystery.

Whether we call it Nature, Love, Grace, or God, the Mystery, the Universe, Implicate order or Divine order, we live continuously with, are connected by, composed of, this immense and unimaginable something, every moment. If we turn our attention just below the surface, on the most ordinary days, doing the most ordinary things, we're apt to come upon the wonder of it.

We come upon it when we listen to music. What is the music? Is it the black notes on the page, the hands moving across the keyboard, the bow touching the strings, the musician playing the piece, the composer who wrote it, the shape of our ear that can receive the sound? None of these can explain, even remotely, the awesome mystery of what we experience when those separate parts come together and touch our soul, nor can any language capture it. At the surface reality we call it listening to music. But at the deeper reality - what? Surely it's a holy miracle.

Are we ordinary folks also holy miracles? I think so. Sometimes we behave as such. But usually our small ego self runs around thinking

it's running the show. On the surface it appears to, but a deeper level, hidden by the ordinary, is the extraordinary - the larger Divine Self connected to and part of everything.

What if . . . What if we began to identify with that Divine Self instead of our small ego self? What if we let our Divine Self be the captain, and our little ego self be first mate? Could we trust the winds of grace to bring us home safe and sound? What would that mean?

Well, right off the bat, it would mean that we could stop being afraid. We'd know we don't have to steer the ship alone. There's plenty of help. We need only ask. We'd have to quiet down a bit though, so we could hear the answers. That might be hard for some of us.

Could we bear to let into our hearts all the suffering and pain of the world? Wouldn't it kill us? Our little ego self, yes. Indeed it would. That's why we close our heart, to numb ourselves to pain. So we won't die from it.

But the Divine Self is more spacious. It has room for everything, good and bad, right and wrong, pain and joy, all of it. All of it. It knows that suffering, finally, serves us well. Aeschylus speaks beautifully to this: "In our sleep pain, which we cannot forget, falls drop by drop upon the heart until, in our despair, against our own will, comes wisdom, through the awful grace of God." The Divine Self knows that pain is only another slice of life, just as necessary, and as temporary, as joy.

Could we trust the Divine Self to lead us out of fear, and into joy? To fill us with wisdom enough to let go of editing and selecting little bits of life, and simply open to all of it, the way it is, in any given moment? To open to ourselves just the way we are - now?

Since the cosmic joke seems to be that we're already connected, we might as well start laughing. Since we already have what we're looking for, we might as well start dancing with it. And since the Divine Self is the *only* one who knows the score, we might as well trust it to write the music, and let that little rascal, ego, sing the song.

Just to be is a blessing
Just to live is holy.
Abraham Joshua Heschel

Please do not think we must be solemn in order to meditate. In fact, to meditate well, we have to smile a lot.
Thich Nhat Hanh

Start learning to love God by loving those whom you cannot love. The more you remember others with kindness and generosity, the more you forget yourself, and when you completely forget yourself, you find God.
Meher Baba

What I have noticed in my small world is that if I praise the wild flowers growing on the hill in front of my house, the following year they double in profusion and brilliance.
Alice Walker

All things are the works of the Great Spirit. We should know well that It is within all things: the trees, the grasses, the rivers, the mountains, and all the four-legged animals, and the winged peoples; and even more important, we should understand It is also above all these things and peoples.
Black Elk

What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.
Ralph Waldo Emerson

To unify your life unify your desires. To spiritualize your life, spiritualize your desires. To spiritualize your desires, desire to be without desire.
Thomas Merton

God is no further off than the door to your heart.
Meister Eckhart

If we are able to see God's image in our neighbor, do you think weapons and generals would be needed?
Mother Teresa

There are many joys to old age, but none greater than realizing that finally you are learning about the really important things. Perhaps God reveals some of the Divine mysteries to us at the very end, just before receiving us.
Quoted by Robert Coles

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